

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE



2014-2015

Letters About Literature

Awards Ceremony

April 29, 2015

10:30 a.m.

Columbia, South Carolina



Introductions	Dr. Curtis R. Rogers, Coordinator, South Carolina Center for the Book
Welcome	Leesa Benggio, Interim Director, South Carolina State Library Ann Addy, Vice President, South Carolina State Library Foundation
Awards	Each student winner will be introduced by a South Carolina Letters About Literature judge. Winning students will read their letter and receive their award. Photos may be taken after each student receives the award and group photos will be taken at the end of the program.
Closing	Dr. Curtis R. Rogers

Level Three – High School

First Place Shelley Sasser, SC Whitmore School, Chapin

Second Place Sierra Davis, Newberry High School, Newberry

Third Place Alexis Williams, James F. Byrnes High School,
Duncan

Level Two – Middle School

First Place Audrey Royall, Dent Middle School, Columbia

Second Place Cassie Brenner, Forestbrook Middle School,
Myrtle Beach

Third Place Samuel Gavin, Riverside Middle School, Greer

Level One – Elementary School

First Place Lindsey Knott, Crossroads Middle School,
Columbia

Second Place Addie-Grace Cook, Heathwood Hall Episcopal
School, Columbia

Third Place Noah Shroff, Atheneum/Vine & Branches Home
Educators, Conway

Shelley Sasser

Conway, SC 29528

December 13, 2014

Letters About Literature

Competition Level 3

P.O. Box 5308

Woodbridge, VA 22194

Dear Mr. Twain,

For my high school tenth grade English course, I have recently read your novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I must admit, that at first I was not at all thrilled about reading your book. I am a sixteen year old girl, and I was not in the least bit interested in the wild, untamed antics of your protagonist Huck Finn, a young boy “thirteen years old or fourteen along there”. However, as the novel study began and I took time to understand and enjoy the reading assignment, I discovered my view of myself was positively evolving because a little bit of Huck Finn is in me, too.

I know from experience what life is like on the run and how it feels to be abandoned. Like Huck’s pap, my father is a homeless drunk and the one who complicates my life. At an early age, it was important for my safety to get away from my father as quickly as possible. Although, vanished from sight, still, my father’s negative presence is felt, and I feel that escape is always an option that I look and wait for.

I appreciate your satirical sense especially directed at society's need to "civilize" a minor. In a way, Huck Finn is a rebel who stands firm against conformity. I am also a rebel. I enjoy learning and I hunger for knowledge. However, presently, traditional brick and mortar education is not for me. I am an online virtual public charter high school student. At times, society seems unwilling to accept the option I have chosen to educate myself. This society which I am a participant in is composed of my peers' parents, big businesses such as financial institutions, and government agencies like the Department of Motor Vehicles. These societal entities question the validity of my schooling method. I chose virtual education because I aspire to become more than my father ever did and to live a better life just like Huckleberry Finn.

I must say, I totally am on that raft with Huck! Every day, I feel that I am moving with the flow or against the current of the mighty Mississippi River. Instead of navigating through powerful waters as Huck, I navigate through multi-dimensional layers of notes, fills, and beats. I am a musician. My Mississippi River, my escape route, is my music. My raft is my drum kit; my oars are my electric guitar and my acoustic guitar. My vocal chords are the current.

Upon my abandonment, I found freedom through music and have studied music since age four. My journey and adventures on the Mississippi River are experienced each time I take the stage and share my viewpoints in music much as you did, Mr. Twain, with your written words in the form of short stories and novels.

Mr. Twain, you changed your birth name from Samuel Clemens to Mark Twain. You identified a new persona that defined you. I, also, hope, one day, to find my new defining persona.


You were driven by your passion and understanding of the river and the importance of safe passage in unpredictable waters. In my corner of the world, my understanding of music is my passion. Again, society perceives me as a rebel and believes that I am pursuing the wrong course of study in my life. I enjoy performing rock music. This genre can be untamed and wild, but sincere soul can be found in the compositions. Thus, like the Mississippi River's unpredictable waters, my music and life are similar. For me, the complexity of a guitar lick is like life and the guitar bridge is always highly anticipated which encourages smooth transition.

When the waters were rough and problems in life arose, you wished to hear a strong chest voice bellow *Mark Twain*. When the waters were calm and harmony engulfed life, you hoped to hear a soft whistle voice whisper *Mark Twain*. As to your ears, the literal meaning of *Mark Twain*, was music. And, now, to my ears, your name, Mr. Twain, wards off any disconnect and is music to my ears.

Thank you, Mr. Twain, for your sense of humor and wit. I find that life's daily encounters with others and life's constant bombardment of various situations stemming from local, national, and international current events are more easily swallowed through lots of laughter and a few satirical twists. Indeed, Mr. Twain, I admire your courage to illuminate ironies with such delightful skill. You have changed not only my perception of the world, but most importantly changed and helped me improve upon the perception I have of myself.

Mr. Twain, I enjoyed meeting Huckleberry Finn. He and I have a lot in common and connect. I learned a lot from this boy – from this survivor. Since our first introduction in the public library, I am now even more inspired to embrace adventure and life. I am eager and curious to see what is around the next bend, whether it is a swerving curve in life's river or the perfection of a guitar string technique. I no longer harbor any doubt in myself. Following in your footsteps and in the spirit of Huck, I will pilot my craft.

Yours truly,


Shelley Sasser

Sierra Davis

Newberry, SC 29108

Dear Allen Ginsberg,

As a young writer of both short stories and poetry, I was only vaguely aware of the Beat Generation when I heard about it. I know the essentials, of course: you guys were all about fight against the machine. You know, spitting in the face of propriety and societal norms. It was almost unanimously agreed that your writings held within them a crazed sort of brilliance. In short, you all were the original hipsters. Heck, you even coined the term “hipster”. I was also aware of you, Allen Ginsberg, the frontrunner of the Beats. You’re most famous for your poem *Howl*, which to my understanding was little more than an overly long (and only halfway coherent) ramble about the experiences of unruly New York youth of the post-World War II era. Everyone in the online literature circles that I followed loved you and your friends. Mostly, I was unimpressed.

I was thinking, how in the world did a group of impudent young men contribute to American literature in any way? Why were you so important, anyways? I decided I would find out for myself by reading all of the Beats’ work, starting with yours. I started with *Howl and Other Poems*. Wanting to know more about you as a person, I also got *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, which was edited by your friend Bill Morgan. It was exceptionally easy for me to resonate with the stories found in your erratic prose. I plowed through *Howl and Other Poems* within an hour. All too eager to learn more I about you, I then began to read your letters.

Upon reading the very first letter, during which I was fascinated but largely confused, I decided that I would never again read anything that you had written without a dictionary close by, and perhaps an encyclopedia for good measure. After my first attempt at tackling your book, I had read a whopping four letters, which I found to be quite the achievement. There’s a reason I only read four to begin with. I read them each multiple times. I made comments in the margins. I underlined words I didn’t understand and defined them. I circled unfamiliar phrases and explained them. (My favorite was “You may fire at will, Gridley.”) I placed quotation marks around lines I particularly enjoyed. While reading, I often found myself laughing, scowling in confusion, nodding in agreement, and rereading lines that I wanted to memorize. All of this was from reading four letters out of one hundred and sixty-five.

The Letters of Allen Ginsberg kept my mind racing all throughout what I was convinced would be an agonizing summer vacation filled with boredom and lots of worrying. Never before had I been this challenged by a book. I learned about many things that I probably wouldn’t have given a second thought. Allen, you were refreshingly straightforward. You were viciously intelligent in a way that wasn’t off-putting, but very easy to see. Even at a young age, you possessed a flat sort of humor that screamed of a wry, worldly outlook on life. I felt like I was intimately familiar

with you and your friends as I read your letters. I could imagine you chuckling at my odd exclamations—a groan when it was evident I would have to do some research, a gleeful laugh when I recognized something. The experience was unlike any other.

I found you when I needed you the most. The life of a teenager is a ridiculously frustrating one. Lately, it had difficult for me to write much of anything. For a person who writes day and night about anything that comes to mind, this was a scary experience. My parents are more than a little protective, so I barely had the time to see what few friends I had. I could feel myself drifting away from them, and that hurt. I thought about it every day, until I worked myself into such a foul mood that I found it difficult to concentrate on anything else. It had also just hit me that I was time to get serious about my future, really serious. I was a rising junior in high school. It was time for me to declare my major and start building the foundation for a career. I had no idea what I wanted to do, absolutely zero confidence in my own ability, and I felt like I had no one to talk to about it. Since I thought my fears were irrational and unfounded, I spoke to no one about them.

Reading your letters felt like making a friend. You know, that warm, giddy realization that sets into your chest and pulls a goofy smile onto your face. I was always anxious for a quiet moment to grab your book, my phone, in case I needed to look something up, and a pencil. You weren't a distraction so much as a fount of strength that was always there. Most importantly, you reminded me why I loved writing. In the introduction, your editor said of you, "Wherever he was, whatever he was doing, he did it with a pen and paper nearby. At any moment, he might write a poem, make a notebook entry, or pen a letter to a friend... He has even been criticized by reviewers for writing too much, as if there could ever be too much material to help expand our knowledge [of him]." I want to share my work with the world, in the hopes of making them feel the same way I do when I'm writing. You never held back. You shared your works with whoever was willing to read them. You lifted me up when I was convinced that I should stop writing. Maybe one day, people will say the same thing about me. Maybe they will even criticize me for writing too much. No matter what the future holds for me, I want you to know that you are a large part of my accepting writing as a part of that future.

Forever thankful,
Sierra T. Davis
Newberry, SC

Alexis Williams

Spartanburg, SC 29301

December 12, 2014

Dear James McBride,

The Color of Water is the only book I have ever read to which I could really relate. My father is black, my mother is white, and my grandfather on my mother's side is Jewish. Since I, myself am not Jewish, I do not completely understand everything Ruth went through but having a family member who is Jewish connects me all the more to the book.

This book puts into words everything I have ever felt and thought about as a child. It is comforting to know someone else understands what it was like growing up biracial. Coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s was obviously much harder than me coming of age in the 21st century. Even now people are not as accepting to interracial families; only in the last few years were people truly starting to accept these families. Just like when you were out with your mother and people gave you dirty looks, my family receives the same stares but the looks come more when it is only me and my white mom not so much when it is me and my dad. As a young girl, I never understood why people gave us those looks but as I grew older I began to know why. The stares made me feel like I did not belong and made me question who I really was.

When you talk about looking in the mirror as a boy and seeing someone different in the reflection and hating him I stopped reading. I went back and read the sentence again. I could not believe someone else thought that too. I have been that child in the mirror. I remember being younger and always wishing I was white. Those feelings never stayed long, they would just come and go depending on the day. The older I became the less those feelings perturbed me, but sometimes, on a bad day those feelings creep their way into my mind.

When it comes to Ruth's decision of marrying and having children with a black man, she reminds me of my mom. My mother's family did not approve of her having children with a black man, let alone marrying him but after many years and her family has gotten over it, and we are all in a somewhat decent place. Your mother also did not pay attention to the comments people would make about you and your siblings when you were out together, and my mom always handled the stares in the same way. The only time my mom ever showed that something bothered her was when we were out somewhere and this lady walked up and said, "Oh your girls are beautiful. Do they have

the same father?" My mom said, "Excuse me? Of course they do." Other than that time, my mom pretty much lets things slide.

Even the little things connect me to this book. For example, your love for music and books. When I was in the fifth grade, I began to read a lot. Books were my escape from reality, whenever I read a book I felt like I was leaving my world and entering a whole new world. As I grew older, music became my new escape. My love for music came from my family. I grew up in a home where music was always playing whether it is rap, R&B, or rock. It is just something about putting on my headphones and completely blocking out the world that relaxes me so much.

I will never be ashamed to be biracial. Your book made me even more proud to say I am black and white. It showed me there is someone out there who completely understands everything I have ever felt about being mixed races. But you also showed me it was acceptable for me to have those thoughts; there was nothing wrong with the little girl who hated her mocha skin. Your mother's value of education and the fact that all of her children have become important members of society really inspires me. If men and women who lived through more difficult times can become successful, then what is stopping me?

Thank you for putting into words thoughts I had always suppressed. I realize it is okay to question who you are but never acceptable to deny who you are.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexis Williams". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'A' being particularly large and stylized.

Alexis Williams

[REDACTED]
Columbia, SC 29206

September 10, 2014

Dear J.K. Rowling,

Just two weeks or so before the start of second grade; I read the first Harry Potter book. I honestly didn't expect to be captivated by it at all and, as I look back on it now, I am filled with embarrassment. I had an argument with my father; he wanted me to read the Harry Potter series, I refused. I thought that Harry was going to be a generic, carbon copy book character, and I simply did not want to read a book about that.

My father, however, insisted, so I flipped open the page and began to read, not expecting much.

"Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much."

That sentence captivated me; it touched me; it shook me. It was crafted in a way which just drove a spike into my heart, and to get it out, I had to keep on reading, and so, I did. Harry Potter was by far better than any of *my* life experiences in South Carolina.

Harry was, and is, one of my most favorite book characters. However, who really touched me was Hermione Granger.

The first time I read the book, Hermione was someone I could relate to -- someone who loved books and knowledge, but also loved her friends. She was a strong female character who throughout the series showed that girls could do all that boys could do. You didn't have to be the girl with the rebel highlights through your hair and ripped up clothes to be a strong character, and she showed that.

I was bullied throughout elementary school. It was always because of minor things: I didn't do this or that, or didn't wear that, or I was just plain odd.

Some of the other main targets for bullies was because I liked to learn things and follow the rules.

I also liked to read.

If my oddness wasn't enough to be a target for bullies, the above was. I was ridiculed and made fun of and, sometimes, the comments were simply minor, not as damaging as some. However, with the destructive words, I would never want to go to school or see my tormentors again. I buried myself in learning and reading, the things that distracted me. That, of course, would only increase the bullying.

It was a cycle, and I didn't know how to break it. I thought that the world was going to correct itself eventually, but the world is cruel, and that's not how it works.

The Harry Potter books provided a refuge. I absorbed, I loved, and I jumped into them every time I read them like I did that day in the library so many years ago.

Hermione was brave, she was strong, and she liked to read, like me.

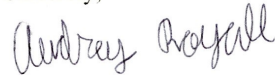
She had best friends, Harry and Ron, who liked her even though she liked reading and learning and following the rules.

It made me have hope for the future.

When middle school came, I was accepted into a magnet program. There, for the most part, the bullying lessened. The people around me liked to read, too; they liked plunging into a book and discussing it in excited voices afterward. I was happier than I had ever been at elementary school.

I never forgot, though, and I still haven't forgotten what it's like to be bullied. However, I also haven't forgotten what it's like to have a Hogwarts to escape to.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Audrey Royall". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid.

Audrey Royall

Cassie Brenner
C/o Forestbrook Middle
4430 Gator Lane
Myrtle Beach, SC 29588

Dear John Green,

Have you ever smelled a book? Like really lifted a book to your face and inhaled the sweet smell of ink and paper? I like to believe that the smell of a book tells a story, the sour smell from getting splashed while reading at the pool, the sickly smell of cigarettes from reading in the car. It reminds me of the adventure of reading it.

To my luck, I was born with a wonderful thing called a *Generalized Anxiety Disorder*, meaning everything (for the most part) makes me freak out. And when I say freak out I mean Freak Out. Like hyperventilating and crying for no reason. So yeah it sucks, that's why I like reading so much. Instead of being a 14 year old girl who cries randomly, I'm Susan, queen of Narnia, or your very own Alaska Young, and it's her story (Alaska's) that changed my life the most.

When you look at me you wouldn't think I'm the kind of girl who A, freaks out over dropping a pencil and B, has re-read the same book, Looking for Alaska, at least 15 times in the last year. I don't know if it's my lack of non-black clothes or my short blue and purple hair, but people assume I'm a "bad-kid". You know the kid who smokes and brings knives to school *cringes*. I only dress in black

so you can't see my soul (oh God, am I goth? This is a serious question).

Between the criticism of old people asking me "why would you ruin your pretty little face with that un-natural hair" and crying over pencils, my escape was the ability to lock myself in my room with your book and re-read it yet another time, and then annoy my friends by only quoting it. Which is one of the highlights of reading it because it gets on their nerves when I say "if people were rain, I was a drizzle and she was a hurricane" for the fifth time that day or when I always talk about "the great perhaps".

I don't know if this letter is cheesy or not. I tried to leave out any other problems because I didn't want to be another one of the people writing "and then my cat died and my fish died and then my great aunt's cousin's fourth child's best friend's sister died and your book made me feel good" because that didn't happen. Your book just made me forget my troubles and cool down (and cry a lot. You can ask the boy I was dating when I first read it; I questioned life for like a month).

Your book smells sour from taking it to the pool, salty from days spent at the beach, sweet from that one time I spilt my mom's perfume, sickly from the cigarettes my mom has smoked on the several car rides where I've read it cover to cover. But most importantly, it smells like home. It smells like safety. It smells like trust.

After reading your book I forced, literally forced, everyone to read it. Half because I think I was a wonderful piece literature, half so they could go through the emotional trauma I went through 'after'. After writing this I really wanna go home and read it again.

Sincerely,
A Teenager Who's Obsessed With You,
Cassie Brenner

Samuel Gavin
Simpsonville, SC
29681

Dear Heather Flood,

My name is Samuel Gavin, and I am currently enrolled in the eighth grade. I am a shy boy and a strong believer in Catholicism. When I was fourteen years old, I was diagnosed with social anxiety. My fears and worries took control of my mind and soul. As time passed, my anxiety changed my view of the world as if it had taken my eyes and replaced them with ones that could only see terror. Everywhere I looked there would be something to fear. Eventually, I stopped thinking about my religion, which had brought me great comfort in times of need. Once this had happened, my soul was built on a foundation of nothing with two horrible friends named Fear and Pain to keep it company.

Unfortunately, going to school didn't bring me any sort of comfort as it did in the past. I felt completely isolated from the other kids because I thought all of them were abandoning me. Additionally, the sight of my classmates telling each other secrets was a steel hammer pounding my heart rapidly. I constantly wished that I had someone in whom I could confide. However, I found this desire to be nothing but ridiculous. I always thought, "Why am I wasting time with such a stupid wish? No one I talk to is going to listen, or even attempt to understand me." Although I knew there were plenty of kind kids, I managed to convince myself that there was no one who wanted my company.

In addition to my small number of friends, I feared almost everybody I met. Every day I felt like someone was judging me based on how I talked, walked, or my appearance. Whenever I entered a room, I imagined people whispering horrible things about me to their friends. However, judgment was not my only horrific fear, but the thought of complete strangers ready to attack me was even worse. Whenever I was in a room with strangers, in particular adults, I felt like people were making awful assumptions about me. I started to worry that everyone's hatred was large enough to the point in which they would want to hurt me, no one would protect me, and that I was vulnerable in every possible way in which a human can be vulnerable.

Moreover, problems with faith affected how I looked upon myself. Although I felt fear within my soul, I have to admit that I was extremely ambitious at times. I wrote down the dreams I wanted to accomplish in life. However, when I looked at them, I started to doubt that they would ever come true. I thought that people with the same talents as me were much better than what I could ever be. In addition to this pessimistic attitude, I began to think that life didn't wish to see what I had to bring to the world. Furthermore, I was scared of taking the road to success. I thought that if I tried to walk on this road, I would eventually mess up and fall. Faith soon became a foreign concept in my eyes.

Fortunately, there was one heavenly day that changed my life for the better. I was researching poems by different authors on the internet. While I scrolled down the screen, I came across your poem *God's Flight*. The title was attractive because it reminded me of the passion I used to have for God, Jesus, and Catholicism. I quickly clicked the link and I read everything you had written. Once I finished reading, I felt as if my fears and worries had been taken away by a supernatural force. Apart from this glorious moment, I felt the same kind, yet mysterious force replace my eyes with ones that saw opportunities, faith, hope, protection, and best of all Jesus Christ. My religious fervor had been restored, and my desire for God seemed stronger than ever.

Furthermore, I started talking to Jesus on a more regular basis. Whenever I was depressed about something, he was there to comfort me. However, the best part of the restoration of my heart was the fact that I didn't feel secluded anymore. Despite the fact that I still had a small amount of friends, I knew that Jesus would always be there to hold my hand and hug me. I finally, after many years of feeling isolated, had a best friend. I now had a companion whom I could confide all of my secrets to, and best of all he listens and understands me!

Magnificent moments were happening from left to right. My feelings within my heart were as happy and light as a dancing feather, for the horrific thoughts of vulnerability, harm, and no protection had been purged from

my soul. I now know that Jesus loves me more than anything, and he will always be there protecting me, whether I am in danger or not. Although there were still times in which I thought I was being judged, I heard Jesus's voice telling me not to worry. Another amazing virtue of Jesus is that he will never judge what I say, for he understands me more than I understand myself. I managed to fight my anxiety each day, for I knew that I was under the protective eye of my best friend. It's the most amazing feeling to know that someone has your back. When I sit in a room with kids or adults, I feel stronger and more protected from harm's reach than I did before I read your poem.

Likewise, my faith was given back to me thanks to your pleasant poem. When I sit down and think about my goals, I know that I can accomplish all of them as long as I have faith. I now embrace the idea that the world is waiting for me to emerge from the shadows and to show my talents, for the tiniest amount of faith has the power to move mountains. All I need to do is trust Jesus and be optimistic not the opposite. Even if I do fall to my knees on the road to success, Jesus will lift me back up to my feet. I now have the will and faith to travel with my friend to reach beyond my dreams. Having faith now comes to me as natural as breathing.

Thank you, Heather Flood for your outstanding poem. I realize that I was never alone during my time of paranoia. You have provided me with a best friend, whom I love and treasure. Moreover, you have restored my faith in accomplishing great things. I now sense Jesus hugging and protecting me wherever I travel.

You truly understand what it means to have trust and faith in God. May God bless you, for you have helped this little, once scared bird, discover his way to new heights.

Samuel Gavin

South Carolina

Lindsey Knott

Columbia, SC 29212

Dear Mrs. Lai,

I read your book in about second grade. I've remembered it extremely clear ever since. I didn't know why until I re-read it last month. I realized *Inside Out and Back Again* carries a powerful message; one that I connect to deeply and support. There were other smaller ones, hidden in short poems that make up the entire book, but if you look at the text as a whole, you start to comprehend the subtle communicate. I'm not completely sure if you meant for the reader to interpret it that way, but that's how I analyzed the text.

When Ha asks her mother why she can't be the first to wake on Tet, her says mother it's because only men can bring luck. She says an old, angry knot expands in her throat. I get the same feeling when people say things like that to me. Sexism was probably more prominent in Vietnam 1975, but I still see it and hear it in the year 2014.

Ha and I both don't handle change in our lives well at all. Of course I've never moved to a completely different country. I can't begin to imagine how onerous it is. But I don't even do well with small change. But at the end of your book, there was one line that I remember; different, but not bad. I feel like this applies to a number of circumstances. For example, all people aren't the same but that's okay. Just because someone looks different, or talks different, or acts different, doesn't mean they deserve to be treated as an inferior.

One thing people tell you when you're young is that everyone is different, and unique, and that you should be who you are, as long as it fits who they think you should be. They are the same people who enforce gender stereotypes and dress code. They get children to conform to the idea of normalcy. Once (I don't remember where or when) I saw a video. There was a young girl who wanted to "do what the boys do, let scars grid her knees and the sun darken her skin." as said in your book. But whenever she wanted to do activities considered masculine, her parents would say something like, "Let your brother handle that." or "That's un-lady like." It ended when she was a young adult and she used the reflective surface of a science fair bulletin to put on lip gloss. This connects to *Inside Out and Back Again* because Ha has no freedom to be who she is due to the limitations of gender stereotypes, like most girls and boys.

Your feminist undertones and quiet words of wisdom have helped me open my eyes to blatant discrimination in today's society. Now I want to speak up about it, I want change the mindset so that has been so deeply ingrained into our day to day lives. That different is bad. That "normal" exists. Because it doesn't.

Sincerely,

Lindsey M. Knott

Addie-Grace Cook
Heathwood Hall Episcopal School
3000 South Beltline Blvd.
Columbia SC, 29205

Dear Ms. Sharon M. Draper,

"Does it really matter" is an interesting phrase, and I come across it often, especially at school. Does it really matter if we know all the states and their capitals? Does it really matter if we know that a square is a rhombus, but a rhombus isn't a square? Will it change our lives to know the Latin root of every word? No, but this "does it really matter" phrase got me going, thinking, imagining. Does it really matter if you're African-American, Asian, white, hispanic, or Indian? I instantly thought of, your book, *Out of My Mind*.

I first read *Out of My Mind* for book club and loved it at the first chapter. The book club leader, Mrs. Melanie, and I were talking about the book. She asked me an interesting question, "Do you think Melody is African American or white?" We thought in a dark silence for a moment. We looked for clues in the book. "We named her Penny because of her copper colored skin. I have dark, short hair." But nothing was clear. We thought some more.

After a few minutes, I finally said what was on my mind, "It never crossed my mind."

She looked deep in thought and then admitted, "Mine either." When my mom pulled up, Mrs. Melanie asked another important question, "Does it really matter?"

I've kept that in thought, lay awake in bed thinking, stared at the ceiling, questioned the way I thought about life. But does it really matter, who's this, who's that? This, I think, is a

value you are trying to teach kids. Not to treat others differently because really we're all people with feelings.

I'm giving this a lot of thought as Martin Luther King day is approaching. Though most kids my age are just excited for a day off of school, I'm giving the reason of the day some thought. Dr. King and Melody are a lot alike. When I start to think about it, Melody and Dr. King were fighting for the same thing: to be treated like the rest of us, like the real people that they are, and we need to recognize that. Right now I'm thinking about her phrase "but does it really matter" and deciding it doesn't matter, because what really matters is that we treat others fairly by what's in their heart, not by their face, name, color, size, or religion. As you can see, your book has shown me doors I never knew were there, and I am thankful for that. Does it really matter, Ms. Draper, does it really matter?

Sincerely,

Addie-Grace Cook, Grade 5

Noah Shroff
120 Red Wolf Trail
Myrtle Beach, SC 29579

Dear Marguerite Henry,

Two weeks ago, I awoke at 6:30 am. I decided to let Dad sleep longer and cook myself sunny-side-up eggs for breakfast—with no help. While I was preparing the butter and eggs, I forgot to turn down the gas heat. When I cracked the eggs, steam and smoke rose from the pan quickly. My eggs burned and set off the fire alarm. The whole family awoke in a frenzy. Dad was startled and concerned. Unfortunately, my short-lived attempt at independence did not turn out how I hoped.

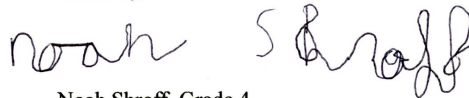
That's why *Misty of Chincoteague* intrigued me. I easily related to Paul Beebe as we seemed about the same age, 10 years old. Like me, Paul had a yearning to dream big. I dream about playing soccer at a high competitive level, like Mom did for the North Carolina Tar Heels. In order to do that, I need to be mature and make responsible decisions with the kind of food and drink I put into my body. I also have to be independent and practice dribbling and trapping on my own—without Mom reminding me.

Paul and Maureen's desire to own and tame the Phantom and her colt, wild horses from Assateague Island, drove the siblings to be independent, mature, and responsible. On Pony Penning Day, Paul was of age to attend the Assateague round up. Even when other men on the team sent him to an area they thought was clear of wild horses, he didn't give up or have a bad attitude. Like Paul, I welcome opportunities when I can rise to a challenge, instead of being babied or protected. After finding Phantom and her colt, Paul tried to guide them into Chincoteague Bay, but the colt was sucked into a whirlpool. Without thought for his own safety Paul jumped into the dangerous waters to save her. As the eldest child, I constantly have to care for and protect my younger siblings.

Caring for domestic or farm animals also requires determination and dedication. Last summer, I was asked to care for a neighbor's 50 chickens and three roosters for five days. I never had such a big responsibility. Of course I was excited to take it on. At dawn, I fed and checked the chicken's water supply. My favorite part was collecting eggs. I placed them gently in a bucket to be scrubbed clean at home. I returned at sunset to ensure they were safely in the coops. Then I locked the gates for the night. I loved the opportunity to do real farm work. Although I wasn't doing the job for income, I gained a loop on my maturity belt. That was worth a whole lot more than money.

Paul demonstrated in *Misty of Chincoteague* great responsibility, maturity, and independence. It encouraged me to see him dream big and do whatever it took to get it.

Sincerely,

The image shows a handwritten signature in blue ink. The first part of the signature is 'noah' in a cursive, lowercase style. The second part is 'Shroff' in a more stylized, uppercase cursive script.

Noah Shroff, Grade 4

2014-2015 Judges

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T.J. Wallace *2015 SC Book Festival Director
The Humanities Council^{SC}*

[illegible]

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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The South Carolina Center for the Book is the South Carolina Affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book and is a cooperative project of the South Carolina State Library, the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science and the Humanities Council^{SC}. The Center is located at 1500 Senate Street, Columbia, SC.

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